

## What Mornings Are For by Deifire

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**Summary:**

Joyce is fine now. Despite this one momentary lapse in judgment.

## What Mornings Are For

### Author's Note:

- For [sonicshambles](#).

The space in the bed beside Joyce is still warm, but empty when she wakes up.

At first she's not sure whether to feel disappointed or relieved he's already gone, until she realizes his boots and pants are still on the floor beside her and hears the sound of cupboards being opened in the kitchen. Then she has a split second of panic before she remembers Will's sleeping over at the Wheelers, and that--in what must have been a moment of parental insanity--she's agreed to let Jonathan go with his friends to spend the weekend at Steve Harrington's parents' lake house.

So there's nobody home to catch Mom making a mistake she promised herself years ago she would never make again.

She wonders how in the world she would ever explain this to the past self that had made that promise. Past Joyce would have a hard time getting past what a son of a bitch Lonnie Byers had turned out to be, let alone the part about the missing son, the monster with no face, and the search that had taken her and Jim Hopper beyond the ordinary world to the place the boys were calling the Upside Down.

And the lights. The flickering lights.

She realizes that despite her plans to meet him in the kitchen for a serious conversation about how this can't happen again, she's gotten as far as sitting up in bed and spending the last she-doesn't-know-how-many-minutes toying with a loose thread on her worn comforter.

"Mornings are for contemplation," she remembers. It's something Hop used to say back when they were teenagers as an excuse to stay in bed and do nothing until long past ten on the weekends.

Oh, god. What's wrong with her that she's found herself back here again?

Nothing, she reminds herself. She's fine. Despite this one momentary lapse in judgment, she's fine.

Everyone's fine now. It's what she tells herself in the morning to get through the day, and most of the time it's even true.

Will's home and back to playing and hanging out with his friends, the only monsters they encounter nowadays in a game of Dungeons & Dragons. And if she sometimes finds him staring off into space and has trouble getting his attention, well, he's been through a lot. It's natural that he's going to need time to adjust. The look on his face when he does that is nothing at all like the one Joyce's Aunt Darlene used to get back when the family realized Darlene wasn't always quite inhabiting the same reality as the rest of them. There's no reason to worry.

No, this is nothing like that.

Jonathan...well, Jonathan *has* friends now. This is a good thing, and Joyce knows she should be happier about it. It's just that one of those friends is Nancy Wheeler, the girl Joyce isn't supposed to know Jonathan has feelings for. And the other friend is Nancy's boyfriend, Steve.

She wonders, not for the first time, if she should have a talk with him about being a third wheel in someone else's relationship. Except neither Nancy nor Steve seem to mind. In fact, half the time, Steve is the one at her door asking if Jonathan's home, and if so, if he wants to come do this or that with them.

It's weird. Joyce knows her threshold for weird should be higher on the other side of surviving the Upside Down, but still. She couldn't imagine her and Hop inviting Lonnie to go everywhere with them--or, for that matter, anywhere with them--back when they were an item.

She definitely couldn't imagine all three of them going over to someone's house to watch TV and somehow winding up with their

arms around each other, cuddled up together in a pile on the couch. Not even if they'd just accidentally fallen asleep watching the Monday Night Movie, and oh god, Mom, it's not a big deal, as Jonathan had insisted far too loudly and without prompting multiple times after she'd come home and walked in on the scene.

But she's not Jonathan. And as much as she wants to help him, or even understand what he's going through, the best she can do is hope he has enough sense to look out for himself.

Besides, if the kids' plans for the future come to fruition, they'll all be at separate colleges soon, and this, whatever it is, will fade the way high school friendships and relationships do for those who make it out of Hawkins.

Joyce herself is fine, and has been since it all happened. Okay, she still has the occasional nightmare. Usually, the one where she's lost Will again--sometimes in the Upside Down, sometimes in a place more mundane like the aisles of Melvald's General store--and she's searching, becoming more and more frantic, until she finally wakes herself up trying to call his name.

But while she's awake, she's fine.

She was even holding it together last night when a storm had blown through Hawkins. She hadn't panicked when the power started to flicker on and off. She'd kept her voice steady during Will's obligatory phone call to make sure she was okay, and told him to have fun with his friends. She'd calmly gotten out the flashlight, found some half-melted candles, and was lighting one with hands that were only barely shaking when she'd heard the knock at the door.

Hop was standing there with a casserole dish like the ones Joyce knows Flo sometimes brings into the office only because she's used to cooking for a bigger family at home and sometimes still accidentally makes too much food, and not at all because everybody not-so-secretly doubts the Chief is capable feeding himself.

Hop, who'd insisted he just happened to be in the neighborhood and remembered how much Joyce liked lasagna. Who definitely hadn't driven out of his way because he knew what Joyce had been through

and thought she might need some company.

She should have thanked him and sent on his way. She hadn't.

When she invited him in to have dinner with her, they should have skipped the drinks. They hadn't.

When the after-dinner conversation turned to reliving old memories, she should have changed the subject and told him goodnight. She hadn't done that, either.

And when--after the storm had blown through and the power was back on, after the candles had burned to nothing, and there was no reason for Hop not to go home--she was struck by the impulse to reach for him and murmur, "Stay," she absolutely should have thought the better of it.

Instead, under stress and without the quest to find Will to channel it into, she'd accidentally fallen back on some very old, very bad habits.

She lights a cigarette, which only reminds her of how hard old habits, once resumed, can be to break.

She needs to get up, get go into the kitchen, and explain to Jim Hopper that...

She needs to figure out exactly what it is she wants to tell him.

When Hop walks back into the room, he startles her so much that she nearly jumps out of bed.

"Sorry," he says. He's standing in her bedroom doorway, clad only in boxers, holding two chipped mugs from her kitchen.

"It's fine," she says, forcing her heart to calm down. "I was just..."

"Contemplating?" he ventures.

"Yeah." She smiles, shaking her head. "Contemplating. Mornings are for contemplation."

"Don't forget coffee," he says, handing her one of the mugs. "Coffee

and contemplation."

Apparently, what mornings are for has expanded in the intervening years. She accepts the mug and takes a sip as he joins her on the bed. It's not bad.

Soon, they need to have that conversation. She needs to explain to him that while she'll always be grateful for what he did for her and Will, there's no room for him in her future.

But for now, she decides she's going to sit with him and enjoy the company, the coffee, and the contemplation. Because for now, everything's fine. At least, that's what she tells herself.

Mostly, it's even true.